

Letter to a Prisoner

Give me hope!

From: Priest Seraphim Holland, PO 37, McKinney TX 75070, To: ... Date: 10/13, 10/26 /2018

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Dear ...: I have a rare Friday were unable to write letters. Normally I take care of my grandson on Friday but his mother took the day off because she is a friend in town. So, I have extra time to write letters. I should be writing a ton of them, but unfortunately, I don't think I'm very efficient today. The last letter I wrote to you was about two weeks ago. I was doing well for a while but now things just seem to be tumbling down. I'm on the lookout for stories like you want me to show you. Perhaps I have a few today. I can see the things are often difficult for you, but it seems to me that you feel better. That makes me very happy.

There's another man in prison who is feeling hopeless. Perhaps you would pray for him. His name is He's been in prison for a long time and probably will die there, and during his incarceration someone he loved very much died. This person was the world to him. I have a long list of people that I pray for that have died suddenly, because my son +Danielⁱ died suddenly. Is loved one is on that list. He also prays for my son Daniel. That gives us both some consolation. I go through my ups and downs, but... mostly through his downs. He a man who seems to have lost hope and lost any sense of joy in the world. I think you know that feeling. Please pray for him. I'm not sure what to say to him. Mostly, I think just the fact that I write to him and that I occasionally see him is all that I can do. Unfortunately, because of the security situation and count problems of the prison he is in, I don't see him that often. I'm glad that I see you every time that I come.

I hope you read the Psalter. In your letter you described me how you have three good days and then 4 hellish days. The Psalter talks about terrible times all the time. In the same breath that the psalmist is saying some terrible thing that is going through or even complaining, he also praises God and expresses hope in Him. I read the Psalter every day, and it is great consolation to me. You might want to try it.

You ask in your letter: **"Can you offer me any hope?"**. The answer perhaps is not what you would want me to say, but it is the truth. I cannot offer you any hope, because I can't fix the things that are wrong with you, or the things that are wrong in your environment. **No man can fix any other man.** So, I myself cannot offer you hope, but I can pray to the One in whom I hope, and I can pray that you would fully believe in that One.

I am absolutely convinced that **the only way to have hope is to experience God**. Although God is very strong, our ability to experiencing Him is very fragile. Of course, He could force Himself on us and make us know Him. We would then be robots. We would not have great sadness, but we would not be like Him at all, and He wants us to be like Him. Therefore, we can experience Him if we struggle to be like Him. This is a hard thing to understand, especially when we are going through terrible struggles.

You tell me that you think it's great that Father David and I have a purpose, which implies that you think you do not. I actually see you living with a purpose, although I don't think you recognize it. You do complain a lot, and you're complaining impairs your ability to experience God, but you are kind person and you care for the people and you pray for other people. That aspect of your personality, which is good, is your purpose right now. The more you care for other people – those you know, and those you see, those you know and whom you do not see because they are far away, and even just those that have experiences that are like your own whom you don't even know – if your heart feels something for them, then I guarantee you you're going to get better.

In your letter you asked me to tell you more of, as you put it: "this good news". I think that you mean stories of when people persevered and God eventually brought them to a better place. I like those stories also. God willing, I will see soon. I will end this letter with whatever stories I can find. I don't know if there exactly what you want, but they have edified me.

A Priest who forgave the man that murdered his son.

I remember confession in the monastery Grigoriou. Then (in 1981) Hegumen George, who is still alive, told me a story.

He happened to take a confession from a dying priest in a small town in Greece. The priest had two children with a very large age difference - the eldest son and a younger daughter. The son went to Athens to study, and with him a tragedy occurred - he died. The body of the young man was found in a deserted place. It was clear that he was beaten to death. Although the son was very religious and led a pious life, the cross was not found on him. And this absence of the cross was very hard for the soul of the unfortunate father. The murderers were not found then, the crime remained undisclosed.

Time had passed. The priest's daughter grew up and she had a groom. The young man was older than her, went to their house and was well received. The priest, who was already widowed by that time, liked him. But he somehow did not dare to make an offer. After a while, when it was already obvious that they loved each other, the groom asked the priest for confession. He agreed, and the young man admitted that he loved his daughter and their family, but he must say that he is not worthy of them, because he is a murderer. At one time, quite a long time ago, he was in a bad company, they were taking a walk, and late at night they came to a young man-and that was in Athens. He began to provoke them, to appeal to their conscience, that they were even more embittered, they began to beat him and beat him to death. Then the groom, the youngest of that company, for some reason, tore off the young man a gold cross, which he still carries with him. With these words, he showed the priest the cross which he recognized the missing baptismal cross of his son. At that moment, it seemed to the priest that the floor was collapsing from under his feet, he himself almost fell. He prayed that God would give him strength. And the young man went on: "You see, such a man rejected by God, like me, cannot be your daughter's husband. Excuse me".

The priest replied: "How can I not accept you into my family, if God Himself accepts your repentance?" They had the wedding, and all photos of the priest's son were removed far away, so that the daughter never guessed that the groom was the murderer of her brother. So, nobody knew this secret. The priest told this only to Father George, in his death confession.

Alexander Dvorkin (Athos stories) from [Orthodox Parables and Stories](#), October 21 at 9:11 AMⁱⁱ

What is grace? An explanation to a child.

Once, after the Divine liturgy, I drank tea with a bun. Suddenly, a father came up to the table with a son of about five years old. The boy's face didn't seem bright to me. It seemed to be one of those children who are only interested in "Mars" and "Snickers" and how to get them from their parents. But suddenly the boy looked anxiously at his parent and asked: "Dad, tell me, what is grace?"

From such a surprise, I almost choked on tea, urgently stopped chewing the loaf and froze, so as not to miss a word. Let me explain why. First: I myself was not clear what grace is. Second: I was wondering how to explain this to another. And third: it was completely incomprehensible to me how to explain this to a five-year-old child. That's why I froze, waiting for how his dad will respond. He twisted his eyes in a funny way and said to his son: "I better not tell you, but I will show you what grace is." And they went to our playground. And I follow them.

"Jump to the high crossbar," said the dad. It became clear to me that the boy would not jump to it in any way. And for sure: he jumped and he was convinced of this. "And now you jump, and I will add grace," said the parent. The boy jumped, his father's hands caught him, and in a moment he ... WAS STANDING on the crossbar. The boy squealed with delight and told the father that he did not want to live without grace anymore.

And me too. Thank God! (Priest George Klyagin) From [Orthodox Parables and Stories](#), October 9 at 6:15 AMⁱⁱⁱ

ⁱ <http://www.orthodox.net/daniel> +DANIEL (an Orthodox Christian) reposed on the Sunday of All Saints, June 11, 2017 (ns), while trying to swim across the Spree river near the Ebertbrücke, 10117 Berlin. He was on a college trip, studying abroad. Daniel had time, and cared for anyone who crossed his path. He was always very kind. Daniel was our son (Priest Seraphim & Marina), brother, uncle, friend. This page is in his memory. Until the resurrection, Son!

ⁱⁱ https://www.facebook.com/Orthodox-Parables-and-Stories-328957564248490/?_tn=%2CdkCH-R-R&eid=ARB6Gok3vofS1Hp3PKFFIvkbIKVj0AMJMY-gOqZuHCxHii8ro7eQsU7e1OhAVMJ1IQM8x6F45aNOAi&hc_ref=ARQW7CiwSg4-pYndTQGGNLOiIHE0n0YGUp6DiPJmeS88XaO9faiFZMbQECuVzIQxiF0&fref=nf&hc_location=group

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.facebook.com/Orthodox-Parables-and-Stories-328957564248490/?_tn=%2CdkCH-R-R&eid=ARBpdVXadGmJqmGeUEdcVeqTwcMgvmAv7J1clpJ3Dmsb3tsvix78rk9PLAUB5SIBArfB2oLM6QmoCoxn&hc_ref=ARQBKZnxqW8Gf0Pi1LDbi2h3AS3RffYvJbhfuZfYrp5AT9lCyoW6ivRRq8noUOvcQ&fref=nf&hc_location=group